

2012 State of the City Address

2011 marked a new beginning for Wyoming. Established 53 years ago, our community is built on a strong foundation. During the first 50 years, we were beneficiaries of a great suburban movement that brought workers, housing, businesses, and several industries to a growing city.

We have come a long way and today have a fully developed community. When our city turned 50, we acknowledged that we needed a new vision for the next 50 years. During 2011, we made great strides in defining that vision. We are now thinking differently about our community and are ready to accept new ideas, new energy, new opportunities, and redevelopment.

In order to move toward becoming the city we envision, our city council engaged with several staff members early in 2011 to explore the important topic of sustainability. We reached out to our up-and-coming professionals who are future city leaders and asked them to help us develop a set of guiding principles around sustainability.

These dedicated staff members reviewed, researched, and developed a statement of sustainability, which will carry us into the future. It has been adopted by our council and will serve as a guide for the current and future councils and staff.

Our definition of sustainability is: The advancement and promotion, with equal priority, of environmental quality, economic strength, and social equity so that a stable and vibrant community can be assured for current and future generations.

It is no secret that Wyoming, like all other municipalities, faces challenges when it comes to finances. We are operating with 30 percent fewer staff while trying to maintain previous service levels. We anticipate that revenues will be down by 8 percent in 2012 based on a shrinking taxable value this year. Yet, if we make choices and decisions that are based upon our newly adopted sustainability principles, we can face our challenges in a way that will position us for success.

A focus on sustainability will be the driving force as we deal with continuing economic challenges. During the last year, like virtually every community in Michigan, we experienced a continued decline in property values, which averaged a loss of more than 6 percent. At the same time, total expenditures were also down more than 6 percent, thanks to efforts by our council and staff. Revenues did increase, but that was due to the implementation of our public safety millage.

This millage was presented as a bridge to financial sustainability. We promised residents that we would use the five years granted under the millage to find a more sustainable model of service delivery for police and fire services. The city council is committed to honoring that promise and will make significant efforts in 2012 to bring us closer to establishing a service delivery model that meets our community's needs and is economically feasible.

In 2011, we began working hard to honor that promise. During the past year, we fully implemented our dispatch partnership with the City of Grand Rapids, saving Wyoming nearly \$300,000. This savings is the direct result of us qualifying for Kent County Dispatch "call-taking" reimbursement through our partnership with Grand Rapids on dispatch services. We would not have been eligible for that reimbursement without this partnership.

We have also entered into a collaboration with the cities of Kentwood and Grand Rapids on a study of our police and fire services to determine whether external collaboration or internal consolidation will be the most efficient model for providing public safety services. Based upon all available data, we continue to provide unmatched municipal service with staffing levels that would be unthinkable in other communities our size. This continues to underscore that City of Wyoming employees work harder and provide service that is unmatched by other communities.

Recently, we signed a “Memorandum of Understanding” with our general union employees to allow interested employees to train as on-call firefighters. This was done as a direct result of conversations with our firefighters. We listened and, as a result, we worked with our employees to form a partnership that will make more trained personnel available.

I am proud to say that the Wyoming Police Department is being considered for accreditation by the Commission on Accreditation of Law Enforcement Agencies. This accreditation is the gold standard of achievement for law enforcement agencies. Across the United States, fewer than 1,000 of the nearly 20,000 police agencies are accredited. This is just one more example of the quality effort occurring in the City of Wyoming and the commitment of the people who serve here.

We have made significant progress in improving efficiencies and identifying cost savings in police and fire services. I remain convinced that the model employed during the last 50 years can no longer be maintained. By the end of this year, I fully anticipate that we will be focused on a fully integrated public safety department or a fully consolidated fire department with various police services.

Governor Snyder speaks passionately about the importance of collaboration and consolidation, and we agree with him. The city’s efforts are not limited to public safety. We are fully engaged with Kent County on its initiative to examine parks and recreation operations throughout the county, with a focus on improved service delivery and cost savings. In addition, we have outsourced some of our Community Development Block Grant administration to the county due to a retirement in our office. These are in addition to several other areas where we have already consolidated or are collaborating on services.

Municipal service delivery is changing, and you can be proud that the City of Wyoming is on the leading edge of that change and plans to stay there. We continue to ask probing questions: Is there a better way? A more efficient way? Should we continue using the same service delivery models of the past 50 years? At this point, everything is on the table.

Government is not the only thing changing; our community is also changing. New census data shows that Wyoming has grown approximately 4 percent since the last census, with the most significant portion of that growth occurring in our Hispanic or Latin-American populations. Currently our population is listed at 72,125, which makes us the 14th largest city in Michigan.

Socially, Wyoming continues to experience changing demographics, socio-economic differences, multiple school districts, and no core central city. These realities can create challenges. In the past, we have looked at these differences as “problems” or “issues” to overcome. As of today, by mayoral proclamation, I declare those items as STRENGTHS in our community. From north to south and east to west, our community is extremely diverse. In the next year, let us celebrate and focus on the cultural, social, and economic diversity that makes Wyoming what it is. I believe there is strength in diversity, and our city needs to celebrate that. We want to be known as a community that offers opportunities for individuals from all walks of life.

One way we can gain from our diversity is to come together as a community. One great way we can do that is by taking advantage of our parks and recreation programs. Nothing breaks down barriers like smiles, sharing and participating. Our parks are open for your use, at no cost to you. We will continue to provide programs in

all areas of the community. We encourage you to join your neighbors and take advantage of one of the finest parks systems in Michigan.

Our neighborhoods are also a strength. This year we will re-launch the Wyoming Community Police Initiative. With the assistance of a federal grant, we will be dedicating Wyoming Police Officers to several neighborhoods in our city where they will be working on a one-on-one basis with residents to address neighborhood concerns before they become problems. The Police Department will also reinvigorate various school programs, community watch programs and other initiatives to help our neighborhoods become stronger and more united.

We remain focused on reaching out and communicating with all sectors of our community. You can engage the city in person, through our three Facebook sites, through our website, by watching our council meetings on WKTV, or by serving on one of our many boards and commissions.

As a council, we want to know what is happening in all corners of our community, and we would like to share that information on our website and Facebook sites as we strive to communicate to our community.

I have made it my mission to walk every street in the City of Wyoming and will complete that task over the coming year. I am doing this in an effort to get to know our neighborhoods and to continue to connect with the citizens of this community. I hope to meet you when I am in your neighborhood. I always attend events throughout our community each year, but this year I want to increase that number to include even more. Please let me know about your events, activities, or gatherings, and I will make every effort to have a representative of the city included. This coming year, we hope to “be involved and be informed” with you.

Our industrial sector is once again seeing investment following a slow period. Just last month you heard me talk about the industrial activity occurring in our community. During 2011, the City of Wyoming has been the beneficiary of nearly \$71 million dollars in new investment accompanied by the retention of more than 2,000 jobs and the creation of nearly 800 new positions. We can thank the following companies for their investment in the City of Wyoming:

Stockwell Manufacturing

General Motors – Formerly Delphi

Michigan Foam Products

Zeeland Lumber

Keebler Company

Weller Truck Parts

Metal Components

Grand Rapids Plastics

Agropur, Inc.

Lee Steel

Benteler Automotive

Priceline

2012 has already started out on a high note with applications for tax abatements from: Gordon Food Service, Detail Technologies, Fisk Precision Technologies, Mark-Maker Company, Reliance Finishing, Michigan Turkey Producers, and HME, Inc.

We are also anticipating the opening of the new Family Fare Supermarket on the Metro Health Campus, and late last year we saw the opening of the first Tim Horton's in the area on 28th Street. We also saw the impressive remodeling and reconstruction of Car City completed.

One of our most exciting projects for 2012 is the former GM site, which will be fully demolished by summer. In some ways, it is sad to say goodbye to a structure that provided so many jobs and so much vitality to the Wyoming community. We celebrate this history, but we also look forward to the new opportunities this property offers. The City of Wyoming will be home to one of the best "ready to build" industrial assets in West Michigan and possibly the entire Midwest. The assets on this property include rail service, highway access, an electric substation, water and sewer infrastructure and various other assets that make this piece of property highly attractive in the industrial redevelopment world. One of our leading industrial redevelopers indicated recently that the Grand Rapids metro area lacks quality industrial property. He mentioned that they have begun building "spec" sites because he has businesses that want to locate in this area. The GM property is ideally located and will be ready to accept industrial activity this year. I hope to be standing here next year talking about the next big project that will help support Wyoming into the future.

Jobs continue to be our top priority as we look to redevelop our community. As we have seen over the past year, Wyoming has quality attributes that continue to attract the investment of our business community. We continue to hear from industry leaders about our outstanding workforce and specifically the diversity of the cultures associated with our workforce. They also continually cite our low tax rates, water and sewer rates, and the city's willingness to work with our business partners to complete important projects as reasons for investing in our community.

We take pride in working with industrial developers as well as commercial ventures. We have worked to create and share our new city vision with our business community and interested stakeholders. Specifically, our Turn on 28th Street Plan was created with the input and ongoing discussion of a vast sampling of our community. Hours of engagement by citizens, businesses and our developer occurred to create a plan for the 28th Street corridor. The planning process, and specifically the citizen engagement piece, was singled out as award winning by the Michigan Planning Association for the efforts made to reach out to our citizens.

Throughout this year, we will begin to brainstorm ideas for the implementation of the Turn on 28th Street Plan. It is important to recognize that change does not occur overnight; however, change can occur. A little more than 10 years ago, we had a two-story Montgomery Ward across the street, an auto center at the corner and a one-story City Hall. Today, we have a Fifth Third Bank, a Family Fare Store, and a New City Hall. Could we have anticipated those changes 10 years ago? In all cases, those projects evolved from plans that somebody said would never going to happen. It did and it will in the future as well. We must be patient and deliberate as we search for the next project that will inspire more renovation on 28th Street.

We also continue to focus on being good environmental stewards. This past year we saw the completion of our newly renovated and expanded Drinking Water Plant, and we completed the last stage of odor control work at our Clean Water Plant. In both cases, we continue to utilize the latest technology to ensure that the resources we depend on provide a sustainable source of water for years to come. The City of Wyoming and our wholesale customers are dependent on Lake Michigan for drinking water and the Grand River for discharge of our wastewater. I am proud to acknowledge that we have two of the finest laboratories for municipal utility plants of any community in the nation. Because of this, we are exploring opportunities to serve other

municipalities with our laboratory expertise. We are also working to identify an alternative to our current process to allow the reduction and elimination of chlorine gas at our Clean Water Plant. Although this solution is a few years down the road, the environmental impact of this solution will be significant. We take our role in protecting our environment seriously.

This past year, we implemented a new LED lighting system for much of the city's decorative street lighting system in the areas surrounding City Hall and 28th Street. These new lighting systems were purchased with federal grant dollars and will provide a long-term lighting solution at a lower cost by requiring a smaller power supply. In addition, throughout City facilities you will now find energy efficient lighting as well as motion switches in many areas. In addition, the move to a four-day workweek has proven to save approximately 10 percent in energy usage at our facilities.

Sustainability, collaboration, and community building will be our pillars for 2012. I am confident that by focusing on these areas, we can address our challenges and strengthen our community. I look forward to the year ahead and to embracing the changes that will make our community a better place to live and work. Some of our choices will be tougher than others, and I do not doubt that for some of us necessary changes will not be easy to accept. Let me assure you that I am committed to this city. I have lived and worked here for most of my life and will live and work here for many more years. I want a community that provides the best value and I know that you do too. That is my goal and that is my mission.

Please join me in being proud of the City of Wyoming and help me in guaranteeing that we can be proud for many years to come. Once again, I ask you to "be involved and be informed." We need all of our citizens to be committed to accepting new ideas, new energy, new opportunities and redevelopment.